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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 06 KABUL 003719

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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, SA/PB, S/CT,
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [MARR](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PAG MAKES FIRST RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESIDENT KARZAI

REF: A. KABUL 3566

[1](#)B. KABUL 3304

[1](#)C. KABUL 3088

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The security situation in the south remains fragile, with an increasingly determined enemy operating freely in key areas according to a joint CFC, ISAF, GOA brief to President Karzai in a Policy Action Group (PAG) meeting on August 16. Wardak said that the enemy is succeeding in propaganda efforts that have convinced locals the GOA and ISAF are losing their will to fight. It was acknowledged that Operation Mountain Thrust had eliminated many insurgents, but these are primarily low-level recruits. Enemy strength is estimated at 7,000, vice a presence of 9,000 ISAF and 4,300 ANSF in the south. To address this situation, the PAG approved ISAF's basic Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) concept combining ISAF and ANSF security with new development projects.

[1](#)2. (S) The ADZ concept remains vague and will take time to launch depending on how long it will take to achieve a level of security sufficient for development projects to be executed in the provinces, and on how long it will take development money to flow. ISAF predicts development activity will begin in late August in Qalat, late September in Helmand and Uruzgan, and October in Kandahar. ISAF has committed to keeping key district centers secure even though they are outside the zones, and has promised to take the initiative in offensives against insurgent positions outside the zones. ISAF's concept depends on donors rapidly completing new development projects, but there is considerable skepticism about delivery before early 2007. Ambassador Neumann proposed that the GOA contribute unallocated funds in tandem with donors to show its resolve.

The GOA responded by asking for a loosening of international procurement restrictions. President Karzai instructed that no one talk publicly about ADZ's either in Afghanistan or foreign capitals for now.

¶3. (S) All agreed that auxiliary police forces could be used if clearly within the MOI chain of command. There is no donor commitment to fund the equipping of such forces. Karzai stated that the first priority must go to funding the training and equipping of the regular forces. More study of auxiliary forces is ongoing. President Karzai said he would find the money himself within the GOA if necessary. End Summary.

Worrisome Security Assessment in South

¶4. (S) At the first PAG presentation to President Karzai, on August 16, Minister of Defense Wardak presented a blunt security assessment developed by the Policy Action Group's (PAG's) Security Operations Group (full text of report follows at end of cable). (Note: The text was coordinated among MOD, MOI, NDS, ISAF, CFC-A, CSTC-A, relevant Embassies, and the four southern governors. End note.) The security situation in the south remains fragile. Operation Mountain Thrust inflicted significant losses on insurgents, but primarily against low-level, easily replaced recruits. The Taliban campaign in outlying areas has convinced significant portions of the local population the GOA cannot deliver governance and that ISAF and international resolve are withering.

¶5. (S) The tempo of enemy operations has fallen since

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mid-July with the exception of Kandahar, but ISAF and ANSF forces remain under attack, inhibiting efforts to improve governance and start new development activities. The analysis estimated that up to 7,000 Taliban fighters are active in the South. (Note: the number of hard-core Taliban is probably lower. End Note.) The quality and quantity of IED attacks has risen. The Taliban are becoming increasingly willing to defend key terrain with large sophisticated, well-armed groups of fighters. The Taliban have developed significant positions in Kandahar Province's Panjway, Zherai and Arghandab districts, as well as Northern and Southern Helmand Province. (Note: not all anti-government activity in the area is associated with the Taliban. Some is related to crime, drugs and warlords. End Note.)

¶6. (S) Wardak concluded that our aim must be to prevent the Taliban from achieving their objectives. He called for ISAF and the GOA to take the initiative, warning that weak maneuverability prevents ISAF and the ANSF from attacking enemy positions. COMISAF, LTG Richards, noted that, although bleak, this report was the combined opinion of experts, with no doubt as to its accuracy. He said ISAF had been looking for a plan to take back the initiative, and that the Afghan Development Zone concept was their solution.

ADZ Concept

¶7. (S) ISAF's Afghan Development Zone (ADZ) concept (see reftels) is designed to address several key challenges in bringing security and development to the South: the people feel disenfranchised; there is a dissatisfaction with governance and the pace of development; the Taliban are exploiting this frustration by convincing the public the GOA and International Community (IC) cannot deliver; and, limited military, police and development resources preclude doing everything required everywhere at once. ISAF and the GOA are therefore prioritizing their actions in certain geographical areas of the south that have key populations, economic development and necessary infrastructure. (Note: regular assessment of these priorities will continue for months. End

Note.)

¶8. (S) The ADZ solution attempts to unify security and development efforts from the GOA and IC to provide a robust level of security in key areas of the south and allow for rapid roll-out of new reconstruction and development projects. ISAF and ANSF forces will provide a security shield based in the priority regional centers and support maneuver teams patrolling outlying areas. The zones are not static and should expand to encompass ever widening territories.

¶9. (S) The ADZ concept was approved in principle by Karzai and the international community at the PAG meeting. Many issues and problems remain and whether ADZs will be different from current operations is not clear. (Note: The Coalition's Mountain series of operations successively focuses on certain geographical areas with kinetic and non-kinetic means, in a not-too dissimilar way as is proposed by the ADZ concept. End Note.) ISAF must take on further offensive operations before launching any ADZs. General Richards predicted the ADZ in Qalat could be functional by late August, Helmand and Uruzgan the second or third week of September, and Kandahar would probably take until October due to the problem of needing to clear insurgents out of Panjway district. In a smaller meeting the evening before, August 15, Karzai stressed to ISAF LTG Richards that our first objective should be to retake all of Helmand. In Kandahar

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province, we should also retake the district of Panjway, he said, hinting darkly that other factors besides the Taliban may be at work there. He said districts that were in our hands must be won back.

¶10. (S) At the PAG, Karzai insisted that no one talk about ADZs publicly; the IC strongly agreed. (Note: it is equally important ADZs are not discussed publicly in Washington.) Discussion of this idea is fraught with problems. Karzai was worried that people might perceive the creation of the zones as a sign government control was shrinking, reminding them of the Soviet strategy of hunkering down in key cities and towns, and retreating. There was also concern that those outside the zones might feel vulnerable. Defining the zones may lead to attacks before security is in place. Richards promised that ISAF would not abandon any key regional centers when the zones were established. He stressed that ADZs are not a defensive concept, and that ISAF will carry on offensive operations to drive the Taliban out of their strongholds.

¶11. (S) The development portion of the ADZ concept is predicated on drawing additional funds that can be delivered immediately following the necessary security & clean up in certain areas. It is not now clear how much will be available; most will be implementation of previously planned work by the Coalition and NGOs. Ambassador Neumann asked that the GOA also move money from programs where funds have not been spent to show GOA support and buy-in. Minister of Finance Ahady said money was available, but procurement rules required by donors prevented its quick usage. President Karzai asked that the donor community lessen strictures for the use of funds transferred to the GOA. He also requested that more funds go to Afghan contractors and companies for smaller projects.

¶12. (S) Comment: The GOA recognizes they need to win both on the ground and in people's minds. The creation of the PAG was the GOA's first effort to come towards a solution. The ADZ concept remains vague. The GOA, ISAF and the rest of the international community have signed on for now. ISAF has promised to not only beef up security within the zones, but hold on to key villages and launch offensive strikes. The Brits, Dutch, Canadians and Australians argue that they can provide the security and roll out new projects to bring governance and development throughout the south. We will

support as we can. Problems remain, and the details are not fully developed. Doubts linger about tangible development results from ISAF being possible quickly. Criticism of the zones, and the projects that will be planned for their clearly defined areas, is likely to harken back to the Soviets barricading down. For these reasons neither the GOA nor the international community will announce or discuss the project, allowing any results to speak for themselves. (It is important that ADZs not be discussed publicly in Washington either.) End Comment.

Police

¶13. (S) It was agreed that police rebalancing may not move fast enough to solve the short-term problem of providing sufficient police forces at the local level where they are needed now. In a private briefing that included Ambassador Neumann and President Karzai the evening before (August 15), Intelligence Chief designate Amerullah Saleh stressed that the GOA is losing Pashtun manpower in Afghan security forces. He said it must either become more active in recruiting

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locally into National forces or make far more use of the tribes. He pointed out that police brought from outside the area - specifically from Kunduz - have all deserted. He said that rebalancing the police is simply not working and not producing the forces needed in time. The weakness of the police forces is also reducing intelligence gathering ability. Saleh said the GOA was losing access to intelligence because police from outside are deserting and police from inside are no longer in contact with local villagers so they are getting less information.

¶14. (S) At the PAG meeting, President Karzai opened the discussion of police forces by expressing strong displeasure at reports from Ghazni that indicate 1042 police are on the payroll, while far fewer actually exist. He was certain fraud exists throughout the country. Karzai decided ANP priorities are to determine actual numbers of police, then recruit to the ceiling and then see if additional numbers of regular police are needed. However, he clearly wants to move forward on auxiliaries so there is not a clear &do all the police first8 prioritization.

¶15. (S) Minister of Interior Zarar outlined a GOA plan to recruit &auxiliary8 police in border regions and areas of high security threats. (Note: The proper nomenclature for these forces is a work in progress. End note.) The first group would be trained and given a one-year contract. The requirements for hiring will be similar to the ANP, with background checks, and following the same procedures. They would be under the command of the local police chiefs, and would receive one month of training in police procedures. (Comment: Zarar did not say that the GOA would want to use the Police Regional Training Centers for this purpose but it probably will. End comment.) The &auxiliaries8 would also require equipment: weapons, communications and transportation. Zarar explained the MOI does not have the needed equipment and would need IC help.

¶16. (S) International representatives accepted &auxiliaries8 could be used if clearly within the MOI chain of command. Details and numbers need to be worked out. The IC has no commitment to pay or equip.

¶17. (S) President Karzai jumped in, saying that, &finally, today everyone speaks my mind and what I've been saying for a year and a half. We need to re-empower traditional and trusted forms of authority.8 (At the previous night's meeting, Karzai had enthusiastically, if gloomily, spoke about how we are losing the population. He intimated that much of the trouble has come from premature removal of key tribal figures (while he did not say so, this seemed to refer

to the former Governors of Uruzgan and Helmand). Karzai said we have systematically disempowered the locals. They are hostile to us as a result, and therefore we must go back to more local government.

¶18. (S) The internationals backed a U.S. suggestion that the auxiliary police be paid and controlled directly by the MOI rather than governors. Ambassador Neumann urged a more detailed plan - who, where and how many. Karzai responded that we should have started this program a year ago, and that the IC should help with auxiliary police and strengthening communities, but if not he would find the money somehow.

¶19. (S) Comment: The issue of police numbers is more challenging, with the GOA planning to move ahead with an &auxiliary8 police program, but asking for international support in money and equipment. The GOA still doesn't have a concrete plan, and though we support the idea, neither we nor

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anyone else in the international community has committed to fund it. End Comment.

Southern Afghanistan Security Assessment (Full Text)

(S) Begin Text:

This assessment has been produced by the Security Operations Group and reflects the combined views of the Ministries, organizations and Embassies represented. It has also been shown to members of the Implementation and Coordination Team and their comments incorporated.

The situation in the south remains very fragile. Operation Mountain Thrust inflicted significant losses on the insurgents, especially in Uruzgan and Northern Helmand, but most are assessed to have been among their lower-level, short-term or peripheral fighters, who are easily replaceable.

We assess that the Taliban campaign to drive Government elements from outlying areas, convince the people that the Government cannot deliver and undermine the resolve of ISAF and the international community will continue. Some fighting is motivated by tribal or criminal factors and not directly related to the Taliban insurgency, and instability is exacerbated by the negative influence of former Governors and Police Chiefs, especially in Helmand and Uruzgan.

Except in Kandahar, the past month has seen a reduction in the tempo of enemy operations compared with mid-July. However, ISAF and ANSF units remain under threat of attack in large parts of the region, making it extremely difficult to deliver effective governance and development. The threat from Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) continues to increase in both quality and quantity.

Recent engagements show that we are facing an increasingly determined and sophisticated enemy prepared to defend key terrain in large groups (100-plus fighters) in developed defensive positions and to use these as a base for ambushes against key lines of communication. There are reliable reports of a significant Taliban build-up in the Panjway, Zherai and Helmand, and that planning has been conducted for an offensive.

Taliban operations in the vicinity of the Highway 1 corridor, particularly near Kandahar City, Lashkar Gah and Qalat, are judged to pose the greatest risk to security in the near term.

Zabol: The Romanian Task Force completed its relieve in place with Task Force Warrior. The largest engagement since they arrived took place on 8 August in south-eastern Qalat, and there are indications of increasing insurgent activity in

the province. The Governor's key concerns are highway security and the district of Seorai.

Uruzgan: Dutch Task Force continued its deployment and conducted security patrols around Tarin Kowt and Dehrawud. They intend to facilitate a major shura to reinforce the Governor's authority. The districts of Charchina (Shahidi Hassas) and Gizab are particular areas of security concern, largely outside the control of government authorities.

Helmand: Major operation conducted to relieve and reinforce Musa Qaleh district center. Northern and Southern parts of the province remain of concern due to high levels of

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insurgent activity. Significant UK forces remain fixed defending static locations in the north of the province.

Kandahar: Heavy fighting in Panjway and Zherai districts, which remain a key Taliban focus. Taliban have established strong defensive positions and fought with determination. Continued enemy activity in the Arghandab district is likely in order to maintain their line of communication to Uruzgan.

ENEMY FORCES/FRIENDLY FORCES

Though hard to assess accurately, there are estimated to be up to 7,000 active Taliban fighters across the south. This compares with 4,300 ANA, over 7,000 ANP (on paper; in practice far fewer present for duty and effective) and about 9,000 ISAF personnel in Regional Command South.

Lack of capacity, including protected mobility and firepower, hinders ANSF ability to conduct offensive operations against the enemy. Corruption, poor leadership and misuse of police resources remain widespread. Work continues to address these issues and to improve the sometimes poor co-ordination between provincial authorities, ANSF and ISAF.

In the weeks following transfer of authority, ISAF will continue to demonstrate to local officials and the people its will and ability to conduct robust and effective security operations across the region. Current and forthcoming ISAF operations to relieve units in place (ongoing for Canadian, Romanian and Dutch Forces, September for UK Forces) will have a short-term impact on their combat capability.

CONCLUSION

Our aim must be to prevent the Taliban achieving their objectives in any forthcoming offensive while positioning ourselves to take the initiative and provide effective security in support of development and governance. The current lack of maneuver capability hinders ISAF and ANSF ability to threaten the enemy in their strongholds.

We need to wrest the initiative from the enemy. I believe the Development Zone Concept, which the Security Operations Group and the other inter-Agency Groups have helped to develop, has the potential to play an important role in helping us do so. I will now give the floor to LTG Richards to describe the status of his work.

End Text.
NEUMANN